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ABSTRACT: The *Internet* and other commercial online services such as CompuServe, Prodigy and America Online are revolutionizing the HR function of many organizations. These services allow HR practitioners to access an almost endless stream of information in text and graphics from any database anywhere in the world. They also connect the personnel department to career centers, to forums for discussing a wide variety of HR issues, and to other organizations that are marketing their goods and services. Personnel professionals likewise use these services as a new source of recruits since online recruiting cuts administrative costs, saves time and lessens paper work. However, online services also have a downside that must be considered. They can be confusing and costly, and may even require a complete overhaul of the HR department. The use of online services by the HR departments of Cisco Systems, Hydro Quebec and Lotus Development is discussed.

TEXT:

Cyberspace offers new frontiers in recruiting, networking and information gathering. In fact, going online is changing the HR function at companies such as Cisco Systems, Hydro Quebec and Lotus Development.

It's just another day on the *Internet*. Inside the offices of Hydro Quebec, a large Canadian utility, Michel Mantha is surfing his way around the world, and he's now looking for the next great wave. Sitting in front of his computer, the HR research adviser is brows-sophisticated hypertext links and graphics to boldly go where HR has never gone before. With the click of a mouse button, he's inside the U.S. government's server in Washington, D.C., examining a schedule of upcoming HR conferences. Then, instantly, he's off to Cornell University in New York, looking at the latest reports issued by the Glass Ceiling Commission. A few minutes later, he's made a lightning-fast pilgrimage to The Quality Wave, an index of sites containing information on TQM, educational programs and business theories.

Every time Mantha sees something that piques his interest, he simply clicks on a highlighted word or graphic image--including high--resolution photographs--to obtain more information. The text pours onto his computer's screen, at which point it can be printed or saved for future reference. And if it so happens that he's jumping to another Web site, the system transports him there at warp speed--efficiently and invisibly, regardless of whether the computer is located in Boston or Bombay. Of course, the World Wide Web is just one portion of the *Internet*. He also uses the *Internet* for E-mail and to subscribe to newsgroups that keep him informed on the latest industry buzz (see "What's All This Talk about Gophers? The Lowdown on Online Lingo," page 66, for definitions of italicized terms). "It's a remarkable way to do research," he states. "It's a revolutionary step forward."

Cyberspace. It's certainly not the final frontier, but it's fast becoming an important part of the corporate arsenal--and psyche. This international network of computers is opening new doors and new opportunities for human resources professionals who have the equipment and the mindset to venture into the online arena. Today, a growing wave of HR managers are going online to recruit personnel, conduct research using electronic data bases, send E-mail, and engage in valuable networking and discussions. Using the *Internet*--which connects upwards of 28 million people and 3.2 million host computers in 70 countries--as well as

commercial services such as Compuserve, Prodigy and America Online, these pioneers are venturing into a revolutionary new world where data and information flow at the speed of light.

"It's changing the way people work and think," says Stephen Gibson, publisher of Online Sources For Human Resources, an interactive online guide and associated monthly newsletter that offer HR cybernauts tips and information on how to better use the *Internet*. Adds Michael Rowe, marketing director for E-Span, an online job-placement service that represents dozens of major corporations: "The online world represents a tremendous opportunity for HR. It's one of the most powerful tools one can have at his or her disposal. Every day, more and more people realize just how powerful this medium is. They're getting beyond the novelty and hype and discovering that it offers solutions to real problems."

But all the gain doesn't come without a good deal of pain. Taking the plunge into the online world can be difficult, confusing and time consuming. Not only must one decide what type of service or provider to use, it's also necessary to learn how online systems work and how one can use them to achieve results. That often translates into learning how to use new software and understanding the finer points of online etiquette. It also means reengineering the way processes work within HR, or even adopting an entirely different way of thinking. And, as with any new medium, things don't always work as billed. Many online products and services aren't as useful as their promoters might like you to think.

Yet, those who have embraced the online world to recruit, research and trade information insist it's a giant step forward. As Tim Johnston, manager of university relations for Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) explains: "The entire world is at your fingertips."

The *Internet* and online services offer HR a wealth of opportunities. Venturing online isn't a particularly complex task in itself. At the most basic level, a computer, a modem and the right kind of software can open the door to the vast world of cyberspace. Those on a network at a major company often can wade into the *Internet* via a direct connection. Using a program designed for today's graphical interfaces, such as Windows or the Macintosh, it's possible to position a cursor on text, icon or graphical image, click the mouse, and travel from one topic, forum or site to another. Interactive and flexible, it allows an end user to gather data--or provide it--quickly and effortlessly. And, depending on the nature of the service, it's possible to connect with others who share similar interests. You might call it the realization of Marshall McLuhan's Global Village.

And that's fundamentally changing the workplace of the 1990s. Although many of those who subscribe to online services use them for reading news, tracking stocks, exchanging gossip, playing games and pursuing interests and hobbies, the online world increasingly is oriented toward business. Just browse the *Internet*'s World Wide Web, an environment that offers dazzling graphics to complement an almost endless stream of text, and it's clear that a growing number of companies are viewing the medium as a way to promote themselves and their products. The list includes organizations as diverse as AT&T, Honeywell, IBM, Eastman Kodak, Microsoft, Ford Motor, Pizza Hut and Ernst & Young.

But the Web isn't strictly a marketing tool for Big Business. In the HR arena, sites such as Career Mosaic, Job Web and the Monster Board offer employer profiles, job openings, career information and human resources forums. In addition, there are long lists of consultants and services peddling their wares and offering their expertise on everything from training to career development. There also are government sites, including OSHA, where an HR practitioner can stay informed on current regulations, directives and even scan OSHA notices in the Federal Register. It's possible to subject or service to another in a matter of seconds--by simply clicking a mouse button. Meanwhile, other portions of the *Internet*--such as FTP, Usenet and Telnet--offer a mind-boggling array of additional resources. You can access mailing lists for your specific interests, along with newsletters, academic studies and an array of background materials.

The breadth of the material truly is astounding, especially if you consider that the *Internet* is only one piece of the online puzzle. Commercial services such as Compuserve, Prodigy and America Online also feature career centers, companies promoting goods and services, and forums for discussing a wide range of HR-related topics. They're easy to access

and relatively inexpensive. And those who wade online agree that these services are becoming more powerful all the time. Today's generation of Windows and Macintosh software provides an easy way to navigate online quickly and seamlessly. DOS and UNIX users also can take advantage of proprietary software designed to enhance and simplify the process.

Cyberspace is a new recruitment source. Not surprisingly, many within the HR field are beginning to take notice of the vast online universe. And recruiting is perhaps the hottest area of all. Step inside the Menlo Park, California, headquarters of Cisco Systems, a fast-growing, internetworking firm, and you're likely to see the HR department of the future. Almost all open positions are posted on the *Internet*--on the firm's own World Wide Web homepage and on various career services. Net browsers can view as many as 400 ads at any give time.

And, apparently, a lot of people like the idea of looking for work online. The company receives as many as 700 resumes electronically every month--approximately 30% of the total it receives overall. Some months the figure has reached 50%. All resumes automatically are routed into a Resumix system, where they can be recalled at a moment's notice--whether at the Bay Area headquarters or across the country at the firm's Boston or Raleigh sites.

"Company recruiters no longer have to spend their time scouring resumes to find the appropriate candidate; they simply can fill the position," says Barbara Beck, vice president of human resources. "Going online has provided us with a tremendous boost in productivity. It's facilitating communication, and it's making it easier for everyone to use HR services. It allows us to add maximum value. We're working very hard to stay ahead of the technology curve and have an extremely sophisticated human resources organization."

Indeed, Cisco's Web site, besides displaying the job listings, contains information about the company's products, its financial data, its culture and history. "And that saves a lot of time for HR, which no longer has to field as many inquiries," Beck says. Another HR person who finds online recruiting particularly appealing is Elaine Hart, manager of recruitment for Staples, the nation's third largest discount office-products superstore chain. In March, the Framington, Massachusetts-based company joined the Monster Board, a career center and job-placement service on the *Internet*'s World Wide Web. Hart typically posts listings within Staples' homepage; when job seekers browse through, they're able to click on an icon to go to the company, and then search job openings by region, category and other parameters. They're also able to get information on the company itself.

"It's a way to demonstrate that the company is on the leading edge of technology, and it's a way to make the entire recruiting process more efficient," says Hart. Indeed, when an applicant responds to a posting, the E-mail message is routed directly to Hart's computer. A process that can take weeks using traditional methods--newspapers, trade ads and paper-based resumes--now can take only hours. That allows Staples to find qualified applicants far more quickly. In addition, electronic postings create greater flexibility. Hart can modify or remove an ad if it isn't working or if a position is filled.

Recruiting online saves time, reduces the amount of paper Hart must handle and lowers administrative costs. But, more importantly, venturing online allows the company to reach an expanded audience. Already, she's receiving as many as a half dozen electronic resumes and applications a day. And virtually all of those who respond to the online ads tend to be highly educated, well trained and perfectly comfortable with computers and online services--a set of skills that's becoming crucial in the 1990s. Of course, many technical specialists--particularly in computer hardware, software and networking--gravitate to online forums, making the medium a particularly fertile area for mining prospects.

This is true for college recruiting as well. Just ask Johnston. Recruiting from college campuses always has been grueling for him. Every time the manager of university relations sets up a job-fair booth, it takes hours to organize the display and get all the brochures and paperwork in order. Then there's the arduous task of conducting one interview after another--a dozen or more in a single day isn't unusual. There's travel time, hotel stays and a steady crush of paperwork to follow up on. By the

time he gets back to his office in Sunnyvale, California, he's typically buried in work. "It isn't especially cost effective or time effective to hit the road," says Johnston, "but it has been a necessity."

Johnston is hoping to change all that. Just more than a year ago, AMD began designing an alternative to the traditional recruiting model. Although the firm continues to seek young talent by participating in more than 30 job fairs each year, it also has ventured into the far reaches of cyberspace. The \$1.6 billion corporation, which produces computer microprocessors and other hightech devices, has begun recruiting online.

Using the *Internet*'s World Wide Web, AMD lists information about the company, the culture, its officers, its compensation and benefits, and other areas of interest to job seekers. If an individual is interested in one of the positions listed, he or she can apply directly from his or her computer. And when AMD needs a specific position filled, it *broadcasts* the news to college job-placement offices and key professors all across the country via electronic mail.

"We have a network in place that allows us to automate recruiting and reach the right people," Johnston says. "It's redefining the entire process. Electronic media never will replace human interaction, but it's clearly going to play a key role in the way AMD and other companies handle HR-related tasks. It's effective, it's efficient, and it saves time and money. Online capabilities allow a greater level of sophistication, and that is increasingly important as everyone battles for a competitive edge."

That's a concept that's well understood at Lotus Development, the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based software giant. It posts ads for approximately 20 positions a year online, but the number is increasing rapidly. "We advertise through all avenues," says Christine Leonardo, director of strategy and programs in the human resources department. "We use *Internet* job postings and traditional newspaper and magazine ads, as well as recruiting at conferences. It's important to have a balanced approach. But the dramatic increase in the number of people online, especially on the *Internet*, is making electronic recruiting more attractive all the time. The *Internet* is an outstanding tool."

One of the big advantages to advertising positions online, Leonardo points out, is that it eliminates many of the space constraints of advertising in a newspaper. Most companies that sell online space don't severely limit the length of the text. And if a company sets up its own site on the World Wide Web, or rents space on the Monster Board or a similar service, it can provide as much information as necessary about the company, culture, benefits and any open positions. "You put an ad in a major newspaper and wind up spending a fortune without saying much of anything," she says.

Recruiting online requires instituting new procedures. When Lotus decided it would go online, it turned to an employment service called E-Span--a four-year-old Indianapolis company that has become a leader in the emerging world of online employment services. Leonardo must simply write the ad and send it to E-Span along with instructions on how to categorize it, and the firm posts it in its job libraries for as long as four weeks. E-Span also provides expertise on how to use the online world more effectively. Because it has a presence on CompuServe, America Online, Genie and the World Wide Web, more than 10,000 job seekers access E-Span's Interactive Employment Network every day. Leonardo sees it as a winning proposition. "Many of these are highly qualified people you wouldn't otherwise connect with," she says.

It's an approach that appeals to growing numbers of recruiting specialists. Rowe says that the number of ads the agency posts now runs between 500 and 600 a week, and has increased tenfold during the last 18 months. "It's a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on technology and use it to HR's advantage," Rowe says. "Paper-based systems aren't going to go away any time soon. There's still going to be a demand for newspaper and trade ads. But this certainly fits into the changing corporate paradigm."

A paradigm that Lotus' Leonardo knows well. Approximately 30 electronic resumes land in her computer every week--and the number continues to grow. After reviewing a resume at her PC, she passes it on to an assistant, who imports it--along with those received by fax and through the mail (the latter are scanned in)--into a resume-tracking program. Then, her department can use key word searches to find qualified applicants in a

matter of seconds. It's efficient enough that Leonardo hopes to increase the number of resumes that enter the system electronically in the months and years ahead. That could eliminate extra administrative personnel, including temporary help during peak periods.

"Online recruiting has many advantages," states James C. Gonyea, author of the Online Job Search Companion and president of Gonyea and Associates, an online career service headquartered in New Port Richey, Florida. "You literally can create a job listing and post it within minutes. You have access to millions of people, and it's generally less expensive than conventional methods, which require a greater support structure. Online systems require less clerical staff and less paperwork." He believes, too, that image entry into the equation. "If you're looking for people with a high level of skill--particularly in technical fields--recruiting online shows that you're on the leading edge." Indeed, those who conduct online recruiting say that although the typical ad doesn't elicit the same level of response as an *advertisement* in a newspaper because far fewer people surf online channels than read newspapers, in most cases, the response is more focused--and the level of candidates often is higher. "You often find people who are very adept and knowledgeable," says AMD's Johnston. (Before you dive headfirst into the *Internet*, however, you may want to give it some more thought. See Gray Matters, page 100.

But recruiting online is a somewhat different ball game than posting ads in a newspaper or a trade publication. Gonyea points out that it's necessary when writing an ad to go online to make sure that the wording and terminology elicit the desired response. Because resumes must be entered into a searchable data base, key words are crucial. "If you're interested in hiring an administrative assistant, but the position might also be referred to as a secretary, you want to make sure that both words are contained in the ad," he says. "Otherwise, a highly qualified person searching for the word secretary online might miss the ad when they conduct a search." And the same goes for anyone searching the data base within the company. "Without strong indexing, you aren't going to pull a list of all the qualified candidates," he warns.

Gonyea also suggests that firms posting ads online should have the capability to receive resumes and inquiries via E-mail. "The last thing people want to do if they're at their computers and they see a listing they're interested in, is print their resume and mail it or fax it. When E-mail capability is missing, it's an indication that the employer really confident or fully conversant in the technology. It can be perceived as a problem. If a company opts to recruit online, it should put all the pieces in place to do it right."

Recruiting online is easy--but it can cost you. The cost of establishing an online presence for recruiting purposes can vary greatly. The least expensive option is simply listing an open job in a professional online forum or an *Internet* newsgroup. That costs nothing, and thousands of such listings are visible on any day of the week. Turning to an outside agency such as Gonyea and Associates or E-Span, which can ensure that millions of users are exposed to the ads, can cost from \$75 an ad to \$3,000 or \$4,000 a year for unlimited advertising. A few firms charge as much as \$10,000 a year. A company that chooses to establish a homepage on the Web's Career Mosaic or Monster Board will likely fork over anywhere from \$1,000 to \$10,000. And organizations intent on setting up their own Web site can spend considerably more. Although a Sun Microsystems or Hewlett-Packard workstation sitting on a desktop can become a server on the Web--thus supplying text and graphics to others on the *Internet*--it's far more challenging to develop an eye-catching interface and link data effectively. As a result, the expertise of an outside consultant or agency often is required.

Still, accessing online services is simple. Venture into E-Span's Compuserve site, and you're greeted with a main *menu* that lists various tools: an introduction to the service; What's Happening at E-Span; Resume Rules; Successful Interviewing; Networking; Tips for Searching E-Span; and direct access to E-Span's Job Search data base. By clicking with your mouse on the topic of interest, you're led through various menus--accessing information along the way. Once you've entered the actual job data base, it's possible to browse ads by subject--marketing, computer programming,

education and media are just a few of the *categories* included--as well as by region. A typical ad offers a page of information about the open position, as well as the company or organization. In most cases, an E-mail address complements telephone and fax numbers, and addresses.

Navigating the World Wide Web isn't any more difficult. With software such as Netscape or Mosaic and powerful online indexes such as Yahoo, it's possible to find HR-related site? and then click through menus and hypertext links to find desired listings. In addition, companies--including AMD, Amdahl, Intuit, McCaw Cellular, General Electric and Schlumberger--offer their own listings within larger sites that provide information on products, services, investor relations and an array of corporate matters. In most cases, it's possible to contact the HR department directly from the Web site.

What's allowing HR professionals at these firms to move so seamlessly into online publishing? Gibson credits the emergence of HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), a typesetting language that has become the standard for documents on the *Internet*. Just by executing a simple command, it's possible to convert a Microsoft Word or Novell WordPerfect document into an ASCII format that harnesses the Web's hypertext and graphics capabilities. No sophisticated programming needed, no lengthy conversions with expensive software.

"The landscape is changing," says Gonyea. "The old world order of storing resumes in filing cabinets is disappearing. Electronic methods of collecting, storing and recalling resumes and employment data are playing an increasingly significant role. Many companies are beginning to realize that they must complement conventional approaches with an online presence. Otherwise, they're likely to miss an important segment of the job market. And, as time passes, it's going to become a standard way for all companies to do business."

HR professionals are going online to network and gather information. Hunting job candidates in cyberspace is only one part of the overall picture. As HR professionals become more knowledgeable--and comfortable--with the technology, they're venturing into other online areas. Some of the most popular uses for the *Internet* and commercial online services are professional forums, bulletin board systems (BBSS) and discussion groups. In most cases, HR professionals freely share information on topics as diverse as training and development, HRMS, payroll and benefits, and legal requirements. By posting a question in the appropriate *location*, it's possible to have responses in a matter of hours rather than days or weeks. Often, illuminating discussions develop.

"It's a powerful medium for networking and trading information," says Gibson. "In many respects, it's like having a workshop or conference available any time of the day or night. Instead of making 10 or 15 telephone calls to colleagues to discuss an issue, or searching through reference materials to get the latest information on a hot topic, it's possible to have it at your fingertips with almost no effort at all. It's like opening a window to a world you never knew existed."

Mantha knows just how powerful the medium can be. The HR research adviser spends an hour or more logged onto the *Internet* daily. Responsible for researching a variety of HR subjects, including TQM and business process reengineering, he checks more than half a dozen different bulletin boards, where he exchanges news \and information with colleagues from all over the world. In addition, he subscribes to more than half a dozen electronic mailing lists, including Cornell University's highly respected HRNet, and reads other newsgroups by accessing a part of the *Internet* known as Telnet. The newsgroups include discussions and information on topics as diverse as best practices and performance management.

"It's enabling me to do things I wouldn't otherwise be capable of doing," remarks Mantha. "It's providing a tool that allows me to do my job more effectively and more quickly than others who aren't online." A few months ago, for example, when Hydro Quebec needed to develop an employee satisfaction survey, Mantha found himself wading deep into the *Internet*. Seeking other corporations with at least 20,000 employees that had conducted comprehensive census surveys, he posted a query on an *Internet* newsgroup. Within 24 hours, 30 HR professionals responded, including top managers at Federal Express and United Parcel Service. Says he: "I didn't

need to research the issue any further. All the information I needed was there. Without the *Internet*, I would have been forced to make dozens of phone calls and check back issues of magazines and newsletters."

And that wasn't a one-time event. During the last year, Mantha has connected with senior human resources executives at Motorola, IBM and other major corporations. "I have developed my own online network," he says. Yet discussions with colleagues are just part of the *Internet*'s allure. When Hydro Quebec wanted information on diversity and women's issues, Manta logged onto a Cornell University Web site that offers academic papers, government reports and research on the issues. He downloaded two dozen reports--many between 50 and 100 pages--printed them out and handed them to his boss. They were used by several colleagues and served as background material for a presentation at a conference. "There's no question that I could have gotten the same material by writing and requesting it. But it would have probably taken weeks instead of minutes," he says.

At Cisco Systems, Beck and human resources managers routinely check other companies' Web sites, organizations, associations and government pages so they can do benchmarking and other research. "It's a powerful tool you can use without ever leaving your office," Beck explains. Her staff also uses E-mail with attached files to send and receive documents and information with dozens of other high-tech companies. "If a compensation analyst needs to get information from another firm, they often do it using E-mail and the *Internet*. It's quick and it's easy."

Though Beck and Mantha are particularly adept at using online services, they're certainly not alone. Approximately 10% of Hydro Quebec's HR department currently has *Internet* access--and the number is growing rapidly. At Cisco, virtually everyone has access from their desktop. Outside these companies, online use is also on the rise. Subscriptions to Cornell's HRNet have increased from approximately 600 to 1,400 in 18 months. And on Prodigy, where the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) launched a professional HR forum last December, more than 6,000 individuals have accessed the service.

Although increasing, these numbers are still low. "There's an opinion that the HR profession has been a bit slow to catch up to the computer revolution," says Mike Frost, manager of the SHRM Forum. "Unfortunately, most in the profession simply aren't using the computer to the extent of its capabilities. An online forum, among other things, encourages people to think about their computer as more than just a word processor or a data base. It's a way to tap into lots of useful information and resources right from your desktop. It's a way to exchange information, at a time when the flow of information is crucial. With the *Internet*, you don't need a plane ticket or a hotel reservation to participate in a conference."

The same goes for many independent BBS sites, where HR professionals can log on to electronic bulletin boards with a modem and access reams of data. "The HR profession relies on networking, information chasing and people knowing other people," says Robert Keach, president of HR-CONN, a Pleasant Hill, California, service with more than 350 active members. "The online medium is a natural marriage between the technology and the HR profession. It's a way to shrink the world greatly expand connections--rather than finding yourself limited only to the cards you can fit in your Rolodex."

HRCOMM offers an array of features for HR professionals--all at no cost. It's possible to search the National Directory of Compensation & Benefit Surveys; advertise a job opening; search for a new job; conduct, participate and view custom-designed online surveys; track down consultants, contractors and other experts; download files and software; and engage in discussions on virtually any HR-related topic. Companies promoting their services online fund the BBS. "People only now are beginning to get a sense for what the technology can do for them," explains Keach.

Access reams of information via cyberspace. As the *Internet*, commercial services and independent BBS sites expand, the level and quality of information also is improving. As Mantha illustrates, it's now possible to conduct serious research using the World Wide Web and other parts of the *Internet*, such as FTP (File Transfer Protocol), which allows public access to remote computers. Venture into the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration's Web site and you'll get a

good idea of what's available. OSHA posts the text of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (including Amendment 1990), OSHA notices contained in the Federal Register, the Field Inspection Reference Manual, corporatewide settlement agreements, and an assortment of directives, documents, regulations and interpretations. The Web site is updated twice a week.

For an online user, navigating OSHA online is as simple as clicking the appropriate *menu* and reading text. It's also possible to use built-in hypertext links that allow you to jump to a variety of other OSHA-related services and sites, including the Office of Information and Consumer Affairs, the agency's Draft Ergonomics Proposal, and an extensive list of publications and booklets on a wide range of safety- and health-related topics. Other links can lead a user into scores of government data bases, including Fedworld, which serves as a repository for a seemingly endless supply of federal-government statistics, data and information.

Government sites aren't the only place to find useful information, either. Many independent companies--including consulting firms--post reports and surveys. And articles from business publications offer information on a wide range of HR topics. The *Internet*'s electronic newsstand includes American Demographics, Executive Female, Sloan Management Review, Inc. magazine, and dozens of other publications. Compuserve features Forbes and Industry Week. And America Online offers Business Week, Time, San Jose Mercury News, ABC News and many others. Frequently, it's possible to search back issues by keyword for specific topics.

Archival data bases, such as Compuserve's Magazine Database Plus and Business Database Plus, also can provide articles--particularly on mainstream topics such as benchmarking, pay for performance, TQM, business-process reengineering and an array of other topics. Using key words to search a topic, it's possible to download stories and print them on an "as needed" basis--almost always for a fee. More sophisticated services such as Nexis Lexis and Dialog offer even more advanced--and expensive--capabilities. Says Gibson: "The problem isn't finding information, it's sorting through everything to find the right information."

In fact, experts say that a few mine-fields await lackadaisical cybersurfers. One of the biggest problems, argues SHRM's Frost, is that the Information Superhighway can easily become the Misinformation Superhighway. "Just because you find something online doesn't mean that it's current or accurate. There's a lot of garbage masquerading behind fancy graphics and interesting hypertext links. Unfortunately, information has a certain legitimacy when you see it online. But that doesn't mean that it has been researched or that it's being presented by a legitimate authority."

That's the hype factor. Although the breadth of online resources is remarkable, depth is sometimes lacking. Differentiating between a five-star site and a one-star site requires patience and critical analysis. Yet it isn't the only concern. It's also important to pay attention to copyright laws and take care when reposting information online. The ease with which data can be copied makes it ripe for copyright abuse. And, finally, there are plenty of challenges in simply learning to navigate the Net. The sheer size of the online world is daunting, and there is etiquette--more often referred to as "netiquette"--you must adhere to. Users who fail to follow accepted procedures invite the wrath of others--known on the *Internet* as "flaming." "It's a little bit like learning to ski," says AMD's Johnston. "It is frustrating at first, but if you stick with it you will learn how to do it and it will become fulfilling. There is a ton of information out there, and the tools for obtaining the information are getting better all the time."

Online ability is changing the HR profession. HR professionals who venture online say that they can't imagine doing things any other way. With AMD's recruiting moving heavily online, Johnston can focus on ways to do his job more effectively. By *broadcasting* information to university job-placement offices and key professors, he's able to reduce the time it takes to fill a position and zero in on top candidates more effectively. "I'm spending far more time using E-mail than the telephone. Although there are occasions when the phone is useful, E-mail is faster and more efficient," he states. And that's just the beginning. With the company's

Web site, he doesn't have to worry about constantly updating brochures--an expensive and time-consuming task. "You create a four-color brochure, and it's out of date as soon as it's printed," Johnston says. "Online, we can change data or a graphic overnight at minimal cost." Similarly, he isn't burdened with trying to ship endless boxes of materials to job fairs. He simply directs potential recruits to TO online and check out AMD's Web site--which includes video clips, sound bytes, full color graphics and text. In fact, it's possible to learn about AMD's Austin Texas, facility, and then use a hypertext link to jump into the city's site, which discusses housing, education and recreational opportunities.

Lotus' Leonardo is convinced that the online world represents the future of HR. Soon, applicants will be able to directly access the company's homepage on the Web and find job openings and career opportunities. By clicking appropriate buttons, individuals will be able to receive further information and fill out online forms. They will be able to apply directly, without using E-mail, snail mail or faxes. And, today, when Leonardo needs detailed information on the industry and current trends, she uses the *Internet* and other online services to access newsletters, magazines and even newspapers such as The Wall Street Journal. Says Leonardo: "Going online doesn't eliminate human interaction, it simply makes it more efficient."

Which is precisely the idea. "This is completely revolutionizing the workplace," says Steve Scott, manager of technical recruiting at Staples. "It's creating possibilities that couldn't have been imagined just a few years ago." Concludes Gibson: "The human resources field has lagged a bit as far as getting online, but it now has an opportunity to catch up and take advantage of the tremendous capabilities. It's an extremely powerful tool that fits perfectly into the philosophy of eliminating inefficiencies and becoming a strategic partner. Like it or not, it's here to stay."

So grab your mouse and hit the surf--cyberspace awaits you.

RELATED ARTICLE: Traveling the Infobahn: What You Need To Go Online

Despite the complexity of today's computers and the seemingly arcane language that defines the *Internet*, venturing online isn't particularly difficult--especially for those using a Macintosh or a PC with the popular Windows operating system. Here's what it takes:

You need a way to access the online world: A freeway on-ramp of sorts. If you already have a computer at your desk, that's a good start. To go online, you will either need a direct connection via an existing network or a modem to dial into the *Internet*. A direct connection is extremely fast, but it's usually limited to large companies that can afford the expensive hardware. If your company can provide this capability, it's best to discuss it with someone in information systems. If you will be accessing the *Internet* via a modem, try to use at least a 14.4k bps device, preferably a 28.8k bps. Transferring huge amounts of data and graphics takes time--particularly when the *Internet* encounters heavy use during peak hours. A faster modem also can reduce costly online time when accessing commercial services such as CompuServe (800/848-8990), America Online (800/827-6364), Prodigy (800/776-3552), Genie (800/638-9636) and e-world (800/775-4556). It allows you to download files in less time.

Entering cyberspace is like learning to drive--you have to know how your vehicle operates. If you're interested in using a commercial online service, you simply need to load the appropriate software into your computer, enter a password and a local telephone access number, and log in. If it's a Windows- or Macintosh-based version, such as WinCim or MacCim on CompuServe, the program will likely self-install and take you through the necessary steps to get online. From there, it's a simple point-and-click process. Costs vary, but a minimum of \$8 to \$10 per month is the norm for basic access. If you wish to have direct *Internet* access, which is free of charge, you still need to have a service provider, such as Netcom (800/501-8649) or Delphi (800/544-4005). At present, the only major commercial online service with full access to the World Wide Web is Prodigy, although AOL and CompuServe will soon follow suit (they now offer access to FTP and Gopher capabilities). Commercial services generally charge \$10 to \$25 per month for a basic level of service, which often includes several free hours.

You need a vehicle to enter the info superhighway. It's possible to access many online services using a basic telecommunications program or the

Terminal program that's built into Windows. But unless you're a propeller head who thrives on typing arcane commands into a computer and dealing with the complexities of cyberspace, it's best to use software designed specifically for the task. For the *Internet*, you will need a special program that manages TCP/IP connections. In Windows, it's called Winsock, and more than a dozen firms offer a version of it. *Internet* providers often make it available as part of a package of software that includes several other programs, including Eudora (E-mail), Ewan (Telnet), Archie and Veronica (Gopherspace) and Mosaic or Netscape (World Wide Web). Of course, commercial services are happy to provide you with copies of their E-mail programs--which makes the service more appealing for you, and more profitable for them.

Maneuvering the highway may require a map. Once you're online, you need the right tools. Otherwise, it's a little like trying to see the sites of Paris on foot and without a map--you will occasionally bump into something interesting, but you will also spend a great deal of time staring at sidewalks and fire hydrants. Indeed, it's best to learn how to use online directories, reference guides, and online search features. For example, on the *Internet*, a service called Yahoo (developed by Stanford University) offers a sophisticated indexing system that can lead you to tens of thousands of sites. WebCrawler and Infoseek are a couple of others. And don't neglect a good book, such as *Zen and the Art of the *Internet** by Brendan P. Kehoe, *Navigating the *Internet** by Mark Gibbs and Richard Smith or *The *Internet* Yellow Pages* by Harlan Hahn and Rick Stout. You may still get lost every now and then, but in the end you'll find the routes that get you where you want to go.

RELATED ARTICLE: What's All This Talk about Gophers?

The Lowdown on Online Lingo

Along with new skills, HR professionals who want to surf the net must learn a new language. Here's a glossary of terms you might need to navigate the *Internet* and commercial online services:

BBS (bulletin board system) An electronic system that allows users to exchange messages and information.

bps (bits per second) A measurement that indicates the speed at which data is transferred by a modem.

Broadband Network A network that can handle multiple signals at the same time--using separate channels to transfer data, voice and video.

Chat The ability to "talk" in real time to other users by typing messages at the terminal.

Cyberspace The whole range of information resources available through computer networks.

Domain The official *Internet* name of a computer as used in E-mail messages. The domain immediately follows the symbol.

E-mail (Electronic Mail) A system of sending messages from one computer to another via online services or over the *Internet*.

FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) Documents that list and answer the most common questions on a particular subject or about a particular site. A regular feature on *Internet* Usenet articles.

FTP (File-transfer Protocol) Allows *Internet* users to transfer files from one computer to another using a telephone line or a network connection. FTP is able to check if information has been received correctly.

Gateway A computer that connects one network to another, despite the fact that both use different protocols. **Gopher** A *menu*-based system for searching the *Internet*. Gopher is a client-server style program, which requires that the user have a Gopher Client program.

Homepage An organization's site or presence on the World Wide Web.

HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) The coding language used to create pages for the World Wide Web. It uses codes that allow the display of fonts, layout, graphics and hypertext links.

HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) The system that allows World Wide Web pages to be transmitted over the *Internet*.

Hypertext A method for writing and displaying text and graphics that allows users to click on an element and jump to related documents or images. On the World Wide Web, that allows users to move from one server to another, across countries and topics.

Listserv Programs that automatically manage mailing lists. Functions

include adding and deleting subscribers, and distributing messages to list subscribers via E-mail.

Mailing List An E-mail address that remails all incoming mail to subscribers interested in the given topic. Modem (Modulator, Demodulator) The device that allows a computer user to connect to other computers via phone lines.

Newsyoup A bulletin board system that allows users access to discussion on a given topic.

PPP (Point-to-Point Protocol) A method of connecting computers together over phone lines. Used to connect individual PCs to the *Internet*

SLIP (Serial Line *Internet* Protocol Allows a computer to connect to the *Internet* via a serial line. Similar to PPP.

Snail Mail Traditional mail services.

TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/*Internet* Protocol) The basic protocol that allows computers to communicate over the *Internet*.

Telnet A first-generation program that allows a user to log on to other computers on the *Internet*.

Usenet A system of distributed bulletin boards, usually referred to as newsgroups. Using a program called a newsreader, it's possible to view messages.

Winsock (Windows Sockets) A standard for controlling the way Windows interacts with TCP/IP. A Winsock program manages *Internet* sessions when connecting via Windows.

WWW (World Wide Web) A sophisticated hypertext system that allows users to browse the *Internet*, viewing text, graphics and video, and receiving sound. Programs such as Mosaic and Netscape allow users to have access to the full capabilities of the WWW.

--SG, with contribution from Matisse Enzer/*Internet* Literacy Consultants.

Samuel Greengard is a contributing editor to PERSONNEL JOURNAL.

To receive a list of online resources useful in the HR field, and instructions for accessing them, complete the Business Center Card included in this issue and completely darken box number 140.

For information on ordering reprints of this article, please see page 8.

Barbara Beck, vice president of human resources for Cisco Systems, recruits online via various career services and the company's own homepage on the World Wide Web. "Going online has provided us with a tremendous boost in productivity," she says.

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